



VOTER APATHY AND SPECTRE OF ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

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Abstract

Despite the present citizens' enthusiasm resulting from presidential signing of the electoral act and introduction of electronic voting machines, Nigerian past elections have recorded gross voter apathy. Such election days were often public holidays, yet many eligible citizens find it difficult to perform their civic duties of casting their ballots at the polls. This exposes Nigerian elections as spectre and casts doubt on classification of its results as popular and sovereign will of the people. Considering the massive social media enthusiasm surrounding Nigerian elections and the eventual voter apathy at the polls, it has become evident that elections are not actually done in the social media, but at the polling centres. Since events do not develop from a vacuum, the gross voter apathy in Nigerian elections must be propelled by some factors. This paper analytically examines voter apathy and spectre of elections in Nigeria; its causes, provenance and dangers in contemporary Nigeria. Exploring the challenges of conducting transparent elections, the study also examines the legitimacy of Nigerian election outcomes characterized by irregularities, malpractices and riggings. The paper however finds that most voters rarely acquire permanent voters' cards (PVC) and eligible ones rarely cast their votes in past Nigerian elections. This bothers on many reasons in which the failure of democracy in Nigerian state is paramount. The paper therefore concludes that voter apathy and spectre of elections in Nigeria may be curbed when Nigerian democracy becomes masses oriented and the body (INEC) administering elections becomes truly autonomous and stuck to its statutory responsibility of conducting inclusive, free and fair elections.

Key words: Apathy; Critical; Election; Examination; Spectre; Voter.

Introduction

Globally, election is one of the democratic means through which eligible voters in a country participate actively in politics. Election is the platform through which the opinions of the citizenry through the eligible voters count in the choice of their leaders. Election thus expresses the generality of citizenry opinion on who represents them in government and who carries their mantle of leadership. These make election a potent instrument of change to the electorates, an effective instrument of representative democracy, and a mechanism for selecting and disciplining leaders in true democratic states (Ezirim, Ohiaegu & Chukwu, 2011). These features do not however reflect in Nigerian society due to spate of voter apathy in general elections. Voter apathy is when the eligible masses consciously refuse to acquire permanent voters' card (PVC) despite media orientations and political mobilisations. It is also visible in the conscious refusal of larger eligible voters to cast their



ballots at the polls during elections. These stand as subversions of democracy which reflect Nigerian elections as spectre that can no longer be ignored in national discourse.

The glaring voter apathy in Nigerian elections however appears to debunk the scholarly conversations and claims on the necessity of western political paradigms, assumptions and liberal democracy everywhere in the world. But, what is souring Nigerian voters in this important aspect of liberal democracy called election and making apathy attractive? Could it be that general elections in Nigeria are dysfunctional, ineffective, devoid of security, transparency and fairness? Could it be that democracy as in western model unsuited Nigerian larger population and is even fatal to them? Could it be that Nigerian state is not practicing true democracy hence the spate of voter apathy in the past general elections? Given the reality of voter apathy therefore, the question remains whether contemporary Nigerian elections can be truly classified as popular and sovereign will of the people? These questions have become fundamental in this treatise as high turnout of voters in the democratic world is taken as evidence of the legitimacy of election and its outcome.

Boosted by end of military juntas and partisan enthusiasm, voter turnout appeared to have increased in Nigeria at the return to democratic rule in 1999. Presently, not many eligible Nigerians care about acquiring PVC and participating in general elections. For instance, the statistics of 2011 general elections showed that only about 73,528,040 out of more than 200 million citizens registered to vote. Eventually, only a paltry total of 38,209,978 voters cast their ballot on the Election Day (Ezirim, et al, 2011).

The reality of voter apathy in Nigerian elections and the mammoth reasons behind it are truly glaring. It all boils down to the mistrust of elections by the greater Nigerian public. This lack of confidence in the electoral system remains the effect of long term “political perfidy” and “political charade” of successive electoral institutions, political elites and ruling class (Odey, 2003: 42). As the people rarely participate in general elections, popular will is however being vitiated. For Nigerian elections are now the businesses of party loyalists and political cabals. The result has been geometric increase in rigging, manipulations, malpractices and violence. These further scare people away from the polls, and prevent them from exercising their fundamental rights of choosing their leaders through their ballots. This situation calls for salvaging Nigerian democracy through making Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) stand to its statutory responsibilities of conducting inclusive, free and fair elections that will again assure Nigerian masses that voting is worth doing.

Understanding the concepts of election and voter apathy

To ensure a better insight and understanding of this philosophical discourse, there is need for brief excursus into the concepts of election and voter apathy. Election is a political process that results to popular and sovereign will of the people. Election is the mechanism through which eligible voters select the leaders of the society and their representatives in



government on behalf of the rest of the citizenry. Election therefore involves popular participation of the masses and exercise of their rights to vote. Since the elected officials function as peoples' representatives, election is an avenue through which peoples' views and opinions count in governance. As such, election remains an existential way through which the citizens of a state participate in governance. As the hallmark of democracy, election is also a channel of peaceful change in government. Since election yields the popular and sovereign will of the people, it is also understood as that which confers political legitimacy on the elected and every democratic government (Ashindorbe, 2018). Viewed from these vintages, election remains the "conveyor or channel through which democracy and its dividends are actualised or concretised" (Ezeugwu & Obiora, 2007: 74).

Voter apathy on the other hand is a subset of political apathy. It is the deficiency of love, devotion and interest towards elections in a political state. "It is the indifference on the part of citizens of any state as regards their attitudes towards political activities such as elections, public opinions, and civic responsibilities" (Yusufu, 2020: 39). Voter apathy is thus the nonchalant attitude displayed by larger population of the eligible citizens during periodic elections. This portrays voter apathy as a collective political behaviour reflecting peoples' passivity and nonchalance towards regular elections. From this perspective, it means that voter apathy is the minimal civic duty of casting votes displayed by eligible voters as sign of their low confidence in the electoral system. Such masses' indifference is as well glaring in the minimal registration of voters for elections, low turnout of registered voters at the polls, indifference of voters towards the ballot boxes and low compliance of the public in election matters.

These meanings however point to voter apathy as civil disobedience. As such, voter apathy reflects a silent rebellion by the aggrieved citizens against their electoral system. In congruence with this view, Ezirim, et al (2011) portray voter apathy as a situation where voters "cease to care about political life, withdraw from obligations to civil society, and perform entirely nominal or rote acts or none at all in political institutions or organizations" (11). Mason, Nelson and Szklarski concur with this view averring that voter apathy consists in "lack of psychological involvement in public affairs, emotional detachment from civic obligations, and abstention from political activity" (205).

Voter Apathy in Nigerian Elections

Since Nigerian transition to democratic rule, voter apathy has become visible in a number of ways. It reflects in people's refusal to register for election. In this direction, voter registration centres are visited by few people despite mass media mobilisation. Apart from this, a large number of registered voters refrain from collecting their PVCs from INEC offices and designated centres. Consequently, millions of these PVCs remain packed at INEC offices and other designated centres across the country. This explains why many polling units have little or no voters on election days. Worthy of note is that many people collect their PVCs not for the purpose of casting their ballots but to use it as a means of



identification in the society. This has become so as Federal Government (FG) recognizes PVCs among the official means of identification in the country.

Truly, many voters display their apathy by leaving the polling centres after casting their votes. Such voters do not care about witnessing the counting of the ballot papers and knowing the fate of the whole vote cast at the end. Along with these are people who wait at the polls for opportunity to sell their votes to any party representative who is ready to offer them money.

Voter apathy in Nigeria also consists in the refusal of the masses to protest against rigged elections. Thus, greater population of Nigerians no longer cares about the fate of democracy in the country. They do not care about the fraudulent elections and beneficiaries of such elections. As such, post-election protests are often carried out by members of political parties that lost election. Voter apathy also reflects in the negative utterances of many Nigerians against the electoral processes. Such utterances tarnish the electoral processes and create general perplexity in the people. These utterances also influence peoples' thoughts and make many eligible voters abscond from participating in the elections. As a result of voter apathy, many Nigerians refrain from assisting the security agents with useful information that will help them safe guard the polls and prevent rigging.

Regarding voter apathy still, INEC website indicates that 57,938,945 people registered for elections in 1999 but only 30,280,052 actually voted. In 2003, 60,823,022 people registered but only 39,480,489 people voted. In 2011 elections, 73,528,040 registered but only 38,209,978 voted. The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) however reveals that the highest voter apathy was seen in 2019 general elections when only 26,614,190 electorates voted despite Nigerian increasing population. In agreement with these records, Ibeogu, Edeh, Abah, Onwe & Ejem (2019) state that,

52.3% of the registered voters voted in the 1999 elections; the figure rose to 69.1% in 2003, then went down to 57.4% in 2011, 43.6% in 2015 and only a handful of 34.74% of the registered voters actually voted in the just concluded 2019 presidential elections (65).

The Spectre of Elections in Nigerian state

Active participation of voters is what constitutes election in a democratic culture. This means that without people's greater exercise of their civic rights of voting, election remains a spectre. As such, the popular and sovereign will of the people is not reflected in any election characterised by gross voter apathy. Popular and sovereign will is the vote cast by the majority of eligible voters who registered to participated in an election. As such, Nigerian elections remain a spectre as it lacks this very ingredient of election, and thus do not meet the minimum requirement in electoral culture. Spectre of elections in Nigerian



state also manifests on their manipulations by the incumbent, “godfathers” and their loyalists. The manipulated victory in this context is often secured through the weapons of the power of incumbency, wealth and violence. Based on this, election victory in Nigeria is not always the popular will. It rather belongs to the candidates who have the wherewithal to take it by hook or crook (Odey, 2002). On this ground, Akubue (2010) alleges that “election results are decided and determined even before the actual election” (35).

Not tailored to reflect true democracy, Nigerian elections are truly mere appearance of democracy. This is as it seems that voters are encouraged to the polls to deceive the world that election happened and winners are products of popular will. For in the polling centres are undemocratic practises like vote buying, multiple thumb printing, thuggery, ballot box snatching and manipulation of results. These subvert the peoples’ will as well as their fundamental longing for a better candidate to emerge as winner of the polls. Glaring in these elections are gross neglect of electoral act and absence of electronic voting system which would have ensured the peoples’ expected transparency.

Historicizing Voter Apathy and Spectre of Elections in Nigeria

Voter apathy and spectre of elections in Nigeria is traceable to pre-independence period. This was when nationalists’ ideologies have no room for masses’ participation in the struggle for independence, decolonization and democratization of the country (Adeoti & Olaniyan, 2014). Apart from this, Ezeugwu and Obiora (2007) attest that state actors in colonial era merely allowed minimal participation of the masses in electoral processes. Along this lane, the colonial constitution of 1951 urged indirect system of elections (Nnoli, 1980). This entrenched an enduring poor political culture that is the fulcrum of present voter apathy towards general elections. Because of this, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe made a complaint to the British Secretary of State for the Colonies requesting his intervention and insistence on masses’ inclusive elections in Nigeria (Ibid).

In negligence of Dr. Azikiwe’s plea, the colonial engineered poor masses election participation legacy was deepened in 1959. This was when universal adult suffrage was merely allowed in federal elections for willing citizens in the south but only willing male adults were allowed to vote in the north. Similarly, secret ballot was practised in other parts of the country except in the north where open ballot was held with voters standing behind the candidates of their choice (Ibid). Ezeugwu and Obiora (2007) allege that these voting practises were not an oversight but a conscious and purposeful “colonial policy of divide and rule” (75). The aim was to ensure that election remains a divisive factor in Nigerian state. As expected, these divisive practises cast a doubt over the credibility of the electoral system and led to voter apathy in the subsequent elections. Thus only a total number of 7,189,797 (75%) people voted out of the paltry 9,043,404 voters that registered for 1959 public elections (Ibeogu, et al, 2019:68). Ibeogu, et al (2019) further reveal that because of



voter apathy, voter turnout in 1979 general elections was at 34% for presidential election, 28.8% for Senatorial election, and 30.7% for House of Representatives' election. Voter apathy also soared high in 1983 general elections as paltry number of 25,430,096 (38%) voted out of 65,304,818 registered voters. The voter turnout for the senate elections of 1992 was however at 39% and that of presidential election of 1993 was at 37%. Ibeogu, et al (2019) documents again that out of 57,938,945 registered voters by INEC in 1999 only 30,280,052 (52.3%) cast their votes.

In 2003 general elections, 39,480,489 (69.1%) voted from the total of 60,823,022 registered voters. Voter apathy continued till 2007 general elections when 35,419,262 (57.4%) voted out of 61,566,648 registered voters. The 2011 general elections were also evident with voter apathy as 38,209,978 people voted out of 73,528,040 registered voters. Similar drop was seen in 2015 when only 29,432,083 (43.6%) voters out of 67,422,005 registered voters cast their votes at the polls. Voter apathy however maximized in 2019 general elections when only 26,614,190 (34.74%) electorates voted out of 82,344,107 registered voters. (NAN, 2019).

Causes of Voter Apathy and Spectre of Elections in Nigerian State

Over the years, successive Nigerian governments have refused to evolve a sound and hitch-free electoral system. These governments have refrained from amending and implementing electoral acts and endorsing the use of electronic voting system that would have rendered general elections transparent, free and fair. As such, what people see in every election has been a charade that has never met the minimum requirement of liberal democratic culture (Ezeugwu & Obiora, 2007). This is coupled with the menace of Nigerian cultural systems to peoples' attitude towards elections. These cultural systems inculcate group boundaries in religion and ethnicity; thereby building tribe-people rather than national patriots out of Nigerian population. Tribe-people in this context consider elections from the point of view of its benefits to their tribe. With this cultural orientation amidst inadequate political information and voter education offered by successive governments, citizenry participation in Nigerian general elections is largely influenced by religious, tribal and ethnic considerations and not national patriotism nor need for nation building (Sulaimon & Sagie, 2015). Based on this, many Nigerians tend to participate in elections when a contesting candidate is from their ethnic nationality, zone or religious affiliation

Besides, people have also seen that candidates of Nigerian elections are not service driven but are rather driven by financial and economic motives. For these candidates therefore, winning election is to have unhindered access to capital accumulation from public treasury, which enables one join the capitalist class. This motive underscores the politicians' desperation to win elections at all cost. As such, these politicians indulge in electoral fraud; vote buying, thuggery, ballot box snatching, physical intimidation, manipulations, violence



and rigging in order to emerge victorious at the polls. Similar occurrences also happen at the party level where internal democracy and sound electoral process are completely lacking. The culprits have always escaped investigation and punishment especially when they are members of the ruling party (Human Right Watch, 2004). Because elections are not service driven, the elected betray the trust of the electors, severe relationship with them, and neglect their campaign promises and party manifestos after elections. On this same reason, Nigerian politics lacks viable opposition parties. As soon as the election is over, those who lost either cross-carpet or form an alliance with the ruling party. As such, the elected pursues egoistic aggrandizement, and rarely maintains contact and consultation with the electorates. Thoughts of these foster the masses' skepticism and hinder their participation in elections.

Apart from the above, some people; especially the learned do not consider election as a best practice in civil society. Like Plato and Aristotle, people in this group are disillusioned by election and the dictatorial and tyrannical features in democracy (Aghamelu & Ani, 2009). The apathy of most learned Nigerians towards elections predicates on the knowledge that the eligible masses do not actually decide their leaders and representatives. This is as members of the political parties which constitute the minority limit the masses to their preferred candidates. These preferred candidates often emerge from transactional/money politics played at the party level in which the party delegates are bribed and their votes bought by the highest bidder. Thus, the voters' role consists in supporting the decision of minority members of one political party or the other. The masses then are left with the sole option of accepting the decision of the majority voters as the sovereign will.

Also exacerbating voter apathy in the country is the alleged vote manipulations by INEC which subvert the peoples' will. Because this manipulation is totally against the political imagination and expectation of the electorates, it has engendered gross voter apathy. This is more so because political imaginations are cohesive connotations that lead to political participation. Thus, Nigerian masses expected INEC to be independent, neutral and transparent. This is to enable it conduct free, fair and credible elections. Yet, there is no indication that INEC differ in any significant way with its predecessors; Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) and National Electoral Commission (NEC). Like every other agency in Nigeria, the neutrality and independence of INEC is on paper; for INEC takes directives from the executive arm of government (Awa, 1993). INEC as well depend on government for funding, logistics, etc. In this way, INEC is vulnerable to government control and have allegedly been compromised by those in government.

Prior to elections, getting PVC that enables one to vote is never an easy task. This is owing to the few registration and collection centres in many parts of the country. Despite this, people still travel outside their localities to acquire PVC that will enable them to vote. Yet, these voters are unable to access the polls where they registered due to government



prohibition of unauthorized vehicular movements on election days. Moreover, the rigorous process of INEC voter transfer to the voter's nearest polling unit has been precarious and often untenable. Many are besides not computer literate to embark on this electronic voter transfer process. Some voters that completed the process of transfer are also yet to receive INEC confirmation via text message, while others who got confirmation were disenfranchised at their new polling units as their names were absent in the voters' registers. Along with this are the repulsive behaviours of some INEC staff that remains a hindering voting memory in the psyche of the masses. These entrench in the mind of voters the belief that their votes will never count and that elections have been rigged with their results already printed.

Consequently, many voters believe that their participation in elections will never change anything; for "the power of incumbency will always prevail" on the INEC to manipulate election results (Umana, 2018:2). As such, voting for many Nigerians are mere fulfilment of the electoral exercise. This view is further justified by the previous INEC administered elections which witnessed massive riggings, irregularities and inflation of results at the collation centres in favour of the incumbents. For instance, election observers estimated that in 1999 presidential election in some states, "less than 10% of registered voters cast their ballots but official documented turnout rates for those same states exceeded 85%" (Ezeajughu, 2021:193). Election observers further reported instances of ballot box stuffing and polling sites where INEC officials collaborated with party agents and illegally printed multiple ballots with their own thumbs. The head of European Union (EU) election observer mission in Nigeria, Max Van den Berg (2007) corroborates the reality of INEC complicity in electoral malpractices in his 2007 general election reports and states,

the 2007 state and federal elections fell short of basic international and regional standards for domestic elections. They were marred by very poor organisation. Lack of essential transparency essential evidence of fraud, widespread voting disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, lack of equal opportunities for political and candidates and numerous incidents of violence. As a result the process cannot be said to have been credible (5).

Based on these evidences, larger Nigerian population is now suffering political depression. This stems from their displeasure over the electoral process which they cannot truly influence through their ballots. This is why many voters are tired of participating in elections.

Scaring people from voting is also the much militarization of peoples' psyche by Nigerian government. Every electoral transition experiences a huge deployment of heavily armed law enforcement agents. Evidences abound where these assumed peace keepers at the



polling units carry out government threats for hoodlums on innocent voters. Adding to these are the activities of party thugs which has often instigated mayhem that claimed innocent lives at the polls. This has now been exacerbated by insecurities posed at the registration and polling centres by terrorists groups like *Boko Haram*, Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP), Bandits, Herdsmen and Unknown Gun Men (UGM) who has vowed no more elections in Nigeria until their wishes are granted by the Federal Government.

Dangers of Voter Apathy in Contemporary Nigerian Society

It is not healthy for Nigerian State to have few people who are willing to participate in elections and perform their civic duties at the polls. This is as people's active participation in elections serves as problem solving process. As such, voting is the power the masses wield in removing corrupt government. Thus, none or passive exercise of this civil right and duty leaves the choice of leadership on the hands of cabals, party thugs and enemies of democracy. This fosters the danger of these elements manipulating the polls to the emergence of military fashioned feudalists, tyrants, dupes and frauds as leaders (Kukah, 2009). These are the kind of leaders that foster poor governance, corruption, waste of national resources, collapse of public utilities, abuse of human rights and rule of law. Such leaders neglect party manifestoes, electioneering promises and ignores even the peoples' strongly held opinion (Thomas, 2004). The reality of such leaders in Nigeria is why the country had not made much progress since return to democratic rule.

The issue of voter apathy direly affects citizen-leadership relationship which is one of the beauties of democracy. Citizen-leadership relationship is a character of democracy in which the greater population of the society devoid of official position in government influences the course of political events (Thomas, 2009). Absence of this crucial relationship renders Nigerian masses helpless and unable to control and shape political office holders and government policies. It has as well deprived Nigerians of critical opportunities to interact and present their predicaments to their leaders. With this, the political inferiority of most Nigerians and their pessimism towards politics has been on geometric progression.

Voter apathy in Nigeria has deepened the conviction of politicians that they can acquire political power without the voters. These politicians now view the masses that constitute these voters as worthless and dispensable. This is more so as active public participation is an integral political activity that brings the importance of the masses in governance to lime light. But just as invisibility of the colonized Nigerians perpetuated the colonial regime, the apathy of the Nigerian voters which now constitutes their invincibility at the polls perpetuates fraudulent dominance of elections by the politicians. Convinced of the dispensation of the masses in acquisition of political power, those in government now attach less seriousness to voter education and public right to political information. This



negligence is the foundation of politico-mental dysfunction which deprives greater Nigerians of critical thinking mind as well as right judgment that ought to purge them of inferiority complex and pessimism towards politics and electoral processes (Ogbu, 1975). Adding to these, voter apathy affects the present attitude of government to the welfare of the Nigerian public. Consequently, the talented and those with ideas and inventions among the Nigerian public are denied the necessary incentives as well as the enabling environment that enhance implementation of dream projects.

Worst still, voter apathy has destroyed the beauty of Nigerian democracy which does not only hinge on transparent and sound elections, but on masses active participation in regular elections. The late Nigerian despot Sani Abacha envisaged what is left of this democracy as “home-made democracy” (Arua, 2009:79). Odey (2002) describes it as activities of an organized clique, cabal, political jobbers, looters and robbery consortium that breed ground for masses’ hopelessness in the country.

Voter apathy has as well led to loss of national character which is among the bedrock of Nigerian good image at the global community. There is now a general poor perception of Nigeria at home and abroad. As such, Nigerian citizens are not only viewed as unpatriotic, they are loathed, abused and humiliated at home and abroad. With the spate of voter apathy, the disunity and disintegration of Nigeria is becoming more pronounced. For among the foremost means of fostering national integration is active public participation in general elections.

Legitimacy of Nigerian elections and outcomes

Like every other political process, the legitimacy of election lies in its accordance with the law establishing and guiding it. The Nigerian constitution and electoral acts are clear on elections as regards its qualities such as inclusiveness, transparency, credibility, free and fairness. This means that election is legitimate when it is authorised by the law, when it is sound and includes the greater population of the eligible citizens. In a democratic world therefore, the constitutional back up, high turnout of voters, and transparency of election are taken as evidences of its legitimacy. These factors too confer legitimacy on the elected that stand as the products of elections. In fact, the high turnout of voters and their active participation makes the results of free and fair elections the popular and sovereign will of the people. This is so because the outcome of the voting exercise stands as the non-tampered majority vote cast which in every democratic setting represents the will of the people. Since most of these political ingredients are lacking in Nigerian elections, it has become clear that Nigerian elections and their outcomes lack political legitimacy. This means that government formed from such elections are illegitimate; for nobody can legitimately govern a civil society from non-transparent and rigged elections.

Challenges of Conducting Free and Fair Elections in Nigeria

Conducting transparent elections in Nigeria would not be an easy task. This is basically



because Nigerian state operates a kind a constitution that gave excessive to the executive arm of government. It is based on this constitutional base that the executive funds INEC, appoints its chairman, electoral commissioners etc. This limits its autonomy, and consequently retains its vulnerability to control. Until the constitutional powers of the executive over INEC are curbed, the electoral institution will remain unable to conduct a neutral election. Another challenge facing free and fair elections in Nigeria is the unpatriotic attitude of the citizenry. The larger population of Nigerian citizenry are indeed more loyal to their tribe than the Nigerian state. It therefore stands that in Nigerian society, ethnic orientation has at every point subdued national patriotism. It is based on this orientation that many Nigerians consider the ethnicity of candidates as basis for their participation in the electoral process. With this orientation, people vote for candidates they consider their own. Recognizing the forces of ethnicity and tribalism against elections, Gyekye (1997) suggests that “people will have to be weaned from the influences of commune-cultural loyalties that obscure and subvert devotion and commitment to the national political community” (9).

The lucrative nature of Nigerian politics would continue to hinder free and fair elections in the country. For this condition will continue to inspire non service driven candidates into contesting elections. This is why elections in Nigeria so far has been all about acquiring political power which gives access to unaccountable wealth (Onuigbo, 2005). Elaborating on this, Forsyth (1982) writes,

political power means success and prosperity, not only for the man who holds it but for his family, his birth place and even his region of origin. As a result, there are many who will go any length to get it, will surpass themselves in order to get it (15).

It is this desperation that lures candidates and their loyalists to engage in all forms of electoral fraud to subvert the will of the people. When this power is acquired, these corrupt elements also do all within their power to deprive the people of free and fair elections that will not favour them while in office.

Also militating against transparent elections in Nigeria is the recurrent control of the electoral body (INEC) by every ruling political party. With this Machiavellian practice, the electoral act guiding electoral conducts have always been supplanted by the ruling political party. According to Areji (2005),

this morality states that whatever action the government takes which is not detrimental to the people in government irrespective of the drastic consequences on the governed is moral, good and just. This is the only morality that will ensure uninterrupted succession, corruption and disregard for accountability, nepotism and despotism, eventual extinction of opposition (individual,



group and political party) and finally the emergence of one party state (56).

With these factors, it becomes paradoxical to expect those who hinder free and fair election to ensure its transparency and credibility.

Voter Apathy as the Technical failure of Democracy in Nigeria

From every indication, periodic elections are not just among the indicators of democracy; they are also the symbol and beauty of democracy (Agu, Okeke & Idike 2013). This is as periodic elections help to actualize the sovereign will of the people, serve the purpose of peaceful change in government and confer political legitimacy on the government. Based on this, democracy everywhere involves the generality of the eligible masses, fosters masses active participation in elections, and thus makes comprehensive treatment of political matters possible.

Sequel to these, voting and citizenry involvement in electoral processes portray democracy as viable and meaningful in any civil society. This however makes voter apathy a pointer to the technical failure of democracy in Nigeria. Otherwise, what explanation could be given about a country of more than 100 million eligible voters recording a voting population of 28 million in the last concluded 2019 general elections? (Ibeogu, et al, 2019). Prior to this were dramatic drops in voter population across previous elections. This indeed raises the question of how democratic is Nigerian democracy?

Voter apathy is therefore a sign of public frustration over the existing electoral system. This is as elections have not enabled them to positively shape the political process by removing clueless and ineffective leaders. As such, greater Nigerian population now believes that election makes very little difference in the choice of leaders and political representatives. This conviction is evident in the voting percentage of 84% in 1999 elections from which popular support for democracy declined to 25% in 2005 before rebounding in 2007 to 39% and declining again consistently in other elections (Agu, et al, 2013). All these signify the technical failure of democracy in Nigerian society. Yet, the failure of democracy in Nigeria is the failure of leadership. This is as this failure of democracy lies with its poor application and negligence of its principles by those in government. The problem with Nigerian democracy therefore lies with what Aristotle calls efficient cause. This comprises the leadership who supposed to apply democratic principles for positive change in the society. These leaders in Nigerian setting are unwilling to apply these principles in the electoral processes. This unwillingness which is also evident in other sectors of the Nigerian society is what is souring the citizenry in democracy, hence the increasing voter apathy during elections. There is therefore no question of the unsuitability of democracy in Nigerian society. Democracy remains the best system of government, and its necessity in human societies remains high.



Towards Resolving the problem of Voter Apathy in Nigerian Elections

Obviously, the present Nigerian electoral process is replete with Strategic Plan (SP) as well as Election Project Plan (EPP) but lacks honest pragmatic leaders with political will to adjust positively the long tradition of electoral malpractices and irregularities that foster voter apathy in the country. To resolve the problem of voter apathy in Nigerian elections therefore, there is great need to inject pragmatic and patriotic individuals into the corridors of power. For it is only pragmatic patriots who can really guarantee transparent elections and the enabling environment that will make voters participate in it. Getting such pragmatic patriots into power does not just warrant an overhauling of the present Nigerian political terrain; it makes open revolution of the masses a desideratum. Great thinkers like John Locke even envisaged this as next option for the masses considering that corrupt leaders will never relinquish power freely for the good of the society (Thomas, 2009).

Revolution must however not be arbitrary less it casts Nigerian society from bad to worse situation. As such, revolution organizers must have a solid blueprint that will guarantee a better electoral process and true democratic Nigerian society. Yet, organizers of revolution must first lead Nigerian masses through psychic revolution against negative human moral political weaknesses and other intrinsic inordinate tendencies that have imprisoned their minds. Gyekye (2007) describes this as substantive moral revolution which involves fundamental changes in the moral beliefs, values and ideals of the people. This mental moral revolution required at this stage could be likened to those of Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad which changed the moral values of their societies and those of other parts of the world. The prior attitudinal revolution of Nigerians therefore, is important in order not to substitute the present set of unpatriotic leaders with another. For given the chance to manage the electoral processes and Nigerian state at large, greater population of Nigerians will replicate the attitude of those presently in government. This is explained by the parts played by the masses in the ongoing poor electoral processes and governance in the country.

For a better start of electoral processes in post revolution Nigeria, power must be handed to proven patriotic and pragmatic technocrats who have dynamic capacity to employ epistemic philosophical and metaphysical choices towards surmounting electoral and national challenges. These must as well be leaders with enough sagacity to create hybrid ideas that will help Nigeria surmount the issue of voter apathy, weaken the culture of cabalism in which nominations of candidates are hijacked in the political parties' internal democracies thereby limiting voters to merely confirm one of the clueless candidates at the polls. These leaders must devise strategies to reawaken effective governance, functional democracy, masses' confidence in the political system, people oriented politics, and transparent political and electoral processes (Kaplan & Weisbach, 1992).



There can hardly be minimal voter apathy without the security of voters and their votes. For proper and adequate provision of this security, there is great need to politically educate; re-orientate and re-train the members of the law enforcement agencies. This will equip them with modern effective techniques of policing, safeguarding and combating the challenges of electoral processes. This will also foster their understanding and appreciation of democracy, and make them democratic in their engagements. This electoral education is important because the Nigerian law enforcement agencies have since colonial days been exposed to defending the interests of the rich, political elites and those in government and not national interests. This bad foundation cannot guarantee the needed switch over of Nigerian law enforcement agencies to defense of election objectivity, transparency and national interests.

Also central in resolving the problem of voter apathy in Nigerian society is the institution of electoral task force (ETF) to monitor and report culprits of electoral malpractices and violence for investigation and prosecution (Human Right Watch, 2004). This investigation must be championed by a committee of inquiry established by law, and comprising of people of proven character. These are important; for a situation where culprits of electoral malpractices and violence are not prosecuted and punished fosters voter apathy. And because Nigerian state is laden with long history of fraudulent elections, there is need for standing justice tribunals to follow up the reports of ETF and findings of the committee of inquiry. This is necessary in order to strengthen the rule of law, electoral acts, give prominence to the transparency of future elections and restore voter confidence in elections. Effectiveness of justice tribunals will then serve as deterrent to prospective enemies of free and fair elections, and thus foster the invulnerability of future Nigerian elections to manipulations and riggings.

Since the continued voter apathy is fast becoming a norm, there is need for adequate political information and voter education in Nigeria. As such, INEC must stand to its statutory responsibility of conducting voter/civic education, sound and credible elections (Electoral act, 2006). This will reawaken peoples' patriotism, political consciousness and curb their present apathy towards politics; elections and democracy in general. To advance political information and voter education in the country therefore, there is need to explore the technology that characterizes the present world. As such, both the INEC and all tiers of government have to adapt electoral processes to electronic channels. This calls for E-Democracy (electronic or digital democracy) which is an environment that will record more informed voters and project electoral processes in a more transparent manner that will restore voters' confidence in subsequent elections. Along with this innovation, those that govern must be compelled to work towards implementation of voting laws and adoptions of cast--the-vote interventions as seen in most advanced democracies like Australia and USA.



Certainly, voter apathy will be reduced in Nigeria when masses truly witness the autonomy of INEC. To restore the confidence of the masses in the elections therefore, INEC must be seen funding itself and taking care of its logistics independent of the executives. To strengthen the autonomy of INEC, there is need to remove the power of appointing INEC chairman and electoral commissioners from the executive arm of government. The Nigerian judiciary council (NJC) can effectively handle this task and ensure neutrality of INEC and integrity of its staff. Along with this, the NJC should be empowered to constantly monitor and probe the performances of INEC staff in order to safe guard the transparency and integrity of the electoral process, and thus sustain voters' confidence in elections. Since NJC has good records of effective monitoring and probing of judicial processes in Nigeria, the body will be able to find out INEC staffs who are secret card carrying members of political parties.

Conclusion

Because election is meant to be masses oriented, it is an important principle of democracy that truly reflects it as government of the people, by the people and for people (Hassan, 2003). In this sense, election is among the major pillar of democracy and voters are important stakeholders in democratic societies. This thus means that in a situation of gross voter apathy as seen in Nigeria, democracy is in question. Voter apathy is indeed a cankerworm that has continued to gain momentum in Nigerian elections. Underscoring this phenomenon are the irregularities, malpractices and atrocities within the polls and collation centres (Anichebe 2007). These manifest in ballot box snatching, manipulation of votes at collation centres, and violence. Since the electorates can no longer exercise their franchise under these poor conditions, the result has been general voter apathy. Voter apathy indeed questions the legitimacy of Nigerian elections and winners of such elections. This is as those elections are devoid of the active general participation of the greater eligible masses. As such, it has become quite difficult to refer to such shams as elections. Since Nigerian elections have been unpopular and below minimum standard of electoral culture based on the menacing voter apathy, its outcome does not qualify as popular sovereign will of the people.



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